

Sesquicentennial Gala:

A Party and a Half for Brampton

On January 17, 2003 Brampton officially began its 150th anniversary. A gala event with "invitation only" guests gathered at City Hall to rub shoulders with dignitaries and bend elbows with refreshments. Congratulations and best wishes reverberated along with historical re-enactments via vignettes and a video of Brampton's early days. Thanks to Rogers Cable, the whole city looked on.

Buffy (me not William) attended as the guest of Rowena Cooper, City Historian, currently transposing her research into written format. Much of my evening was happily spent with Tom and Christine Symons who like many others had travelled a distance to be there. Tom, Founding President and Vanier Professor Emeritus of Trent University, has a keen interest in Brampton.



Rowena Cooper and Tom Symons at the Sesqui Gala.

Grandson of W. Perkins Bull, Tom is related to former Brampton mayors: L.J.C. Bull (1918-19) and B. H. Bull (1945-52-53-54). We viewed the mayors' gallery on the top floor of City Hall. Outside, an illuminated nightscape of downtown Brampton wrapped itself around the memories of people inside and created pulsating nostalgia. Stories from long ago surfaced and shone.

In this issue, another tale, a mystery unravels - The Strange Case of Stefan Swyrda. Author Ken Weber, our January speaker, switches from Prime Ministers' wives to jailbirds as he recalls old justice (or is it injustice?).

Two favourites of Buffy's Corner reappear. Paul Willoughby delivers a post card sequel and George Duncan salutes heritage.

We invite you to enjoy the first Sesqui issue.

Buffy

Brampton Historical Society Newsletter

Buffy's Corner

The official newsletter of the Brampton Historical Society
Conserve, Educate and Celebrate Brampton's History

Buffy's Corners, the original name of Brampton, was the site of the respectable tavern owned by William Buffy, considered to be the father of Brampton. His pioneer spirit (pun intended) lives on in the name of our journal. History "buffs" are invited into The Corner to share their stories and comments.

Volume 5 Number 1 February 2003

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Buffy's Corner
c/o Dorothy Willis

BHS
c/o Peter Murphy

Email us at: bramhis@rogers.com

Brampton *Hysterical* Society Joke-of-the-Month

You know the difference between the American and Canadian Senate? In the U.S., you have to win an election to get in. In Canada you have to lose one.

Buffy's Corner, published 4 times per year, is free to BHS members (see back page for membership details)

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All Aboard!

THANKS TO MEMBERS
WHO HAVE RENEWED
FOR 2003



THE PREZ SEZ

Peter Murphy

It is the frigid and darkest depths of winter within which we find ourselves with the occasional somnambulist jaunt to a hole in a lake for a bout of full contact ice-fishing.

The Steering Committee for Doors Open Brampton 2003 is up and running and we anticipate having approximately thirty sites open to the public, free of charge, on the weekend of September 20 and 21.

While we relied almost entirely upon the Ontario Trillium Foundation to fund last year's event, we shall be seeking sponsorship from the private sector this year. To that end we are going to invite the Mayor, Susan Fennell, to be our Honorary Chairman and we hope that will provide us with a higher profile within the business community.

I remind members of our Annual Meeting that will be held on March 20 and encourage all to attend and consider seeking office on the Executive or offering time as a volunteer. As a not-for-profit registered charitable corporation there is plenty of work for the current batch of volunteers and more assistance would both lighten the load and allow us to expand our horizons.

I shall say no more; the 7.00 a.m. pickerel on Bark Lake beckon.

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Buffy's Corner is printed thanks to the generosity of Peel Graphics Inc.

WELCOME HOME ALDERLEA

Michael Avis, Vice President & Heritage Liaison

Slowly but surely, the rebirth of one of Brampton's finest buildings is becoming a reality. All our readers have, over the past two years, read articles in this publication, the *Brampton Guardian* (Pam Douglas Feb. 28, 2001) and *Community Heritage Ontario News* (Dorothy Willis May, 2001).

The outlook was bleak, the comments, speculation and rumours left little room for optimism. Developers inching in, salivating over the possibility to raze the old building and saddle us with nondescript, misplaced, inappropriate, 'executive' town homes devoid of any architectural significance or interest. There is no denying the need for more sensible residential upscale housing in the downtown area . . . but on the Alder Lea property? I think not!

The saving of Alderlea started with impetus from the Brampton Heritage Board and an impassioned plea for historic designation before the Ontario Conservation Review Board by Paul Hunt, BHS founder and first President and continual nudging from other heritage-minded citizens. City Council, under the skilful guidance of Mayor Susan Fennell, took a major step forward recently and finalised the deal whereby the people of Brampton are now the proud owners of what may well be one of the finest examples of heritage Italianate architecture in the province.

Kenneth Chisholm built his impressive home circa 1867 on land purchased from Brampton pioneer John Elliott. Chisholm was a man of considerable stature as a local and provincial politician, businessman, philanthropist and visionary.

The final chapter has yet to be written. The building, regardless of its historical importance and architectural significance, must be put to good and appropriate use. It cannot stand as a monument to the past gathering dust. Careful planning of its restoration with each step monitored by a heritage professional is key. The challenges are great, but the rewards will be even greater.

A thank you is owed to the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 15 for not merely being the owners of Alder Lea for the past sixty years but also for being custodians. Had they not occupied and maintained the house for all this time, who knows what the situation might be today? Would there be an Alder Lea to save?

Thank you also Mayor Susan Fennell and Brampton City Council. We applaud you and assure you that future generations will be the beneficiaries of your wise and most welcome decision.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE BHS

January 16 - Wives of the Prime Ministers of Canada. Well-known mystery writer of nearly 50 books **Ken Weber** entertained with slides and stories. Through trivia and truth we met the wives who did and didn't stand by their men on Parliament Hill.



From Isabella to Aline, Ken Weber has the floor, talking about the better halves of 24 Sussex.

UP AND COMING EVENTS 2003

February 16 - "Heritage Day" Peel Heritage Complex celebrates Brampton's Sesquicentennial.

February 20 - History of Belfountain Area with one of the "Folks of The Credit", **James Douglas**, President of the Belfountain Heritage Society.

March 20 - Annual General Meeting and "Growing Up in the Gore" with **Ralph Peck**, author of "Before the Black Oxen Come", a collection of personal anecdotes.

Interested in a position on the BHS Executive? Please contact a nomination committee member: **Dorothy Willis**, **Rowena Cooper** or **Paul Willoughby**.

April 17 - Thoreau MacDonald's Sketches of Rural Ontario - Cultural Heritage Landscapes presented by **George Duncan**, Heritage Co-ordinator for the Town of Richmond Hill. (*note change of speaker*)

May 15 - Revisited Ghost Towns. **Harold Wright** gives a slide presentation of Ghost Towns, inspired by **Ron Brown's** book, *Ghost Towns of Ontario*.

May 24 - Walking Tour of Cheltenham with **Shelley Craig**. 1 p.m., United Church. Settled circa 1820, this quaint village promises a spring look back in time.

September 18 - Third Annual Show and Tell by BHS Members. Always a big hit with lots of surprises.

October 16 - Author and historical climatologist Steve Pitt presents "The Night of Hurricane Hazel and Its Aftermath". Where were you when it hit on October 15/16 1954? Water, water everywhere - 180 mm of rain in 24 hours, 81 people dead, 4000 families homeless, the list goes on. Join us on this Hazel Anniversary.

WHAT'S HAPPENING ELSEWHERE

Historic Bovaird House

Mothers' Day Teas May 5 & 11 (by reservation only)
563 Bovaird Drive, Brampton
Info: 905-874-2804 and www.bovairdhouse.ca.

Halton - Peel Branch, Ontario Genealogical Society

Irish Research, Speaker: Margaret Williams
Sun. Feb. 23 2:00 p.m. Oakville Public Library, 120 Navy St., Oakville (note change in location)

Genealogy on the Internet, Speaker: Rick Roberts, from the Global Genealogy and History Shoppe, Milton.
Sun. Mar. 23 2:00 p.m. Chinguacousy Branch, Brampton Public Library, 150 Central Park Drive, Brampton

Wellington County Archives: From House of Industry to Archives, Speaker: Karen Wagner, Archivist, Wellington County Museum and Archives.
Sun. Apr. 27 2:00 p.m. Chinguacousy Branch, Brampton Public Library, 150 Central Park Drive, Brampton

Info: [REDACTED] & www.hhpl.on.ca/sigs/ogshp/ogshp.htm

Friends of the Schoolhouse

Visit the Schoolhouse

On the 2nd Sunday of every month the Old Britannia Schoolhouse will be open from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Info: [REDACTED] & www.britanniaschoolhouse.org

Esqueing Historical Society

Fresh Milk Delivered to Your Door! EHS members present the history of several local dairies. Wed. Mar. 12, 7:30 p.m. Knox Presbyterian Church, Georgetown
History of Methodism in Ontario **John Biddell** talks about the evolution of Methodism in Ontario. Wed. Apr. 9 7:30 p.m. Knox Presbyterian Church, Georgetown
Acton Town Hall Heritage Acton members lead a tour of the former Town Hall and fire hall. Wed. May 14 7:30 p.m. Acton Town Hall, Bower Avenue, Acton
Info: www.hhpl.on.ca/sigs/ehs/home.html

Peel Heritage Complex

Celebrate Brampton's Sesquicentennial Displays in the historic Peel County Courthouse and Jail. Noon to 4 p.m. Sunday Feb. 16, 2003. Free Admission.
Info: 905-791-4055 & www.peelheritagecomplex.org

Milton Historical Society

Ontario Artist-Blacksmith Association The significance of the blacksmith in our early history and demonstration. Thursday Mar. 20, Waldie Blacksmith Shop, 16 James St. Milton

Nassagawaya Historical Society An overview of the history of Nassagawaya. Thursday Apr. 17 Venue TBA
www.hhpl.on.ca/sigs/mhs/index.htm

AGAINST THE GRAIN - OR PRESERVATIONS VS. PROGRESS

George W. J. Duncan, Heritage Co-ordinator for the Town of Richmond Hill



Old buildings, old furniture, faded family photographs and museum collections remind us that we are part of a continuing story: the Lowes House, built in the mid-nineteenth century.

Years ago, while I was working on an architectural drawing of an 1840s house, someone looked over my shoulder and said, "What's the attraction?" meaning - Why are you wasting your time with that old stuff? Clearly, this person viewed an interest in the preservation of historical buildings as being of little value or even a bit weird. Well, it's a free country and everyone has a right to an opinion. But this little exchange got me thinking about why preservationists do what they do.

I believe that it is human nature to embrace progress. It is through change and advancement in science, technology and social philosophy that we have advanced from a primitive condition to the present state of civilization. Birth, growth, maturity and death are part of the natural cycle of most things in this world, and this fact is particularly observable to Canadians in the yearly cycle of the seasons. The same natural laws apply to the buildings and other structures that people have created.

Going back to the 1840s farmhouse - when it was built it embodied the idea of a home - shared by its original owners. It utilized the building technology of its day, and served its purpose well as long as the economic status and social conditions of its owners and the surrounding community stayed pretty much the same. After a couple of generations, the house had aged as the family grew, and the lean-to kitchen was torn down and replaced with a large kitchen wing and pantry. As the 20th century arrived and the years passed, the farming community was being transformed into suburbia, leaving the old home on a small fragment of

the original 100acre farm. With a shopping centre on one side, a subdivision of bungalows to the west and north, and a highrise apartment across the road, the 1840s house, nestled in a tangle of overgrown lilacs, had become an anomaly. Then one day, the aged owner died, the property was sold, the building demolished, and three new houses that embodied a 1980s idea of "home" grew upon the site.

There you have it: birth, growth, maturity and death. The 1840s house had its place in the ongoing stream of time, ultimately to be replaced with new houses that would someday realize a similar fate. And so on.

Now consider what might have happened had historical preservationists intervened in this process. To preserve something that has reached the last days of the cycle, or even think about preserving something, runs against the grain of human nature. Many people just don't see the point of keeping anything old. Isn't it obvious that a new building is better than an old one?

Strangely, as much as we like to move forward, many people still seem to need a sense of rootedness and continuity to feel contented in their lives. We need signposts or landmarks to place ourselves in some sort of temporal context and make sense of our mortality. Old buildings, old furniture, faded family photographs and museums full of the fragments of earlier civilizations remind us that we are part of a continuing story. When we pass from this world, our descendants will carry on and maybe something that we accomplished will remain for future people to wonder at who we were and what we did. After all, when we walk through a building that has weathered 150 years of time and events and generations, don't we wonder about the people who once lived their lives within those aged walls?

I believe that this kind of thinking about historical preservation is at the root of why we do what we do and is necessary in order to keep the faith and press on despite the odds. Spiritual stuff like this doesn't hold much sway when trying to convince developers, political representative and others about the importance of saving this or that old building. Much more effective are arguments based on economic viability, cultural tourism, local employment, and other more practical and measurable concerns. But these are all only the means to an end. Preservation of historical buildings is really about the preservation of a little bit of ourselves.

The above article will appear in CHO News, a publication of Community Heritage Ontario. George has made presentations at the BHS and will return in April 2003. He is the author of York County Mouldings.

BRAMPTON IN POST CARDS

Paul Willoughby

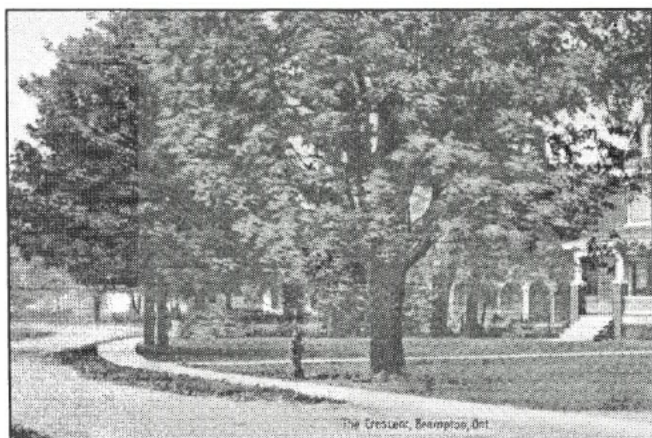


Home (on left) formerly Christopher Stork residence, now Ward Funeral Home. Post cards in this article are published courtesy Paul Willoughby Collection.

My review of Brampton post cards is based on my collection and the Richard L. Frost Collection in the Peel Archives. Mr. Frost was Peel County Clerk and later, Chief Administrative Officer for the Region. He collected 323 cards of Peel, over half being of Brampton.

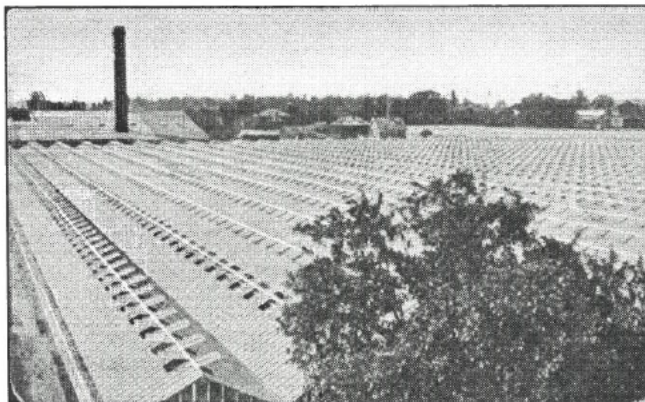
There are the usual scenes found in every town. The Post Office or Dominion Building (now O' Malley's), the library and firehall, (at Queen and Chapel Streets), the churches, the schools, the railway stations, the impressive bank buildings which framed the Four Corners and Peel Memorial Hospital, when it occupied a former house.

There are many scenes of Main Street, showing stately trees, thriving businesses, massive churches, and the meandering Etobicoke Creek. There are several of Gage Park with its bandshell, the impressive Court House and Jail across the road, and a 1915 card of Main Street by moonlight. There are many cards of the beautiful homes, such as Haggertlea with its flower beds right to the road, the elegant Crescent, now called Scott Street and the mansions on Main Street south of Wellington.



Brampton's Elegant Crescent, now Scott Street.

Unique to Brampton were the Dale Greenhouses, among the largest in Canada. There are many scenes of Dales taken from all angles. I have three black and white cards showing crops inside the greenhouses. One of these, unfortunately undated, states that Dale Estates (often called Conservatories) consists of sixteen acres of land, covered by 800,000 square feet of glass. This card, as well as several others, was published by the Brampton Fair.



Acres under glass: the Dale Estate, home of the Dale Autographed Rose

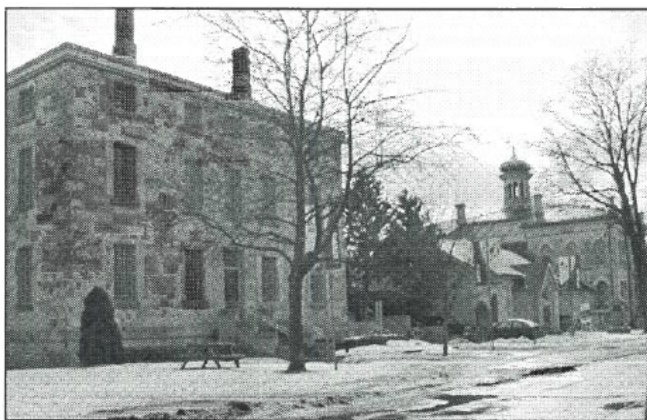
Other industries were not forgotten. There is a small series of four cards showing different views of Copeland Chatterson Printing House. Brampton's once thriving shoe business is well represented. There are cards of the Williams Shoe Factory, the Canada Shoe Company Factory and the Hewetson Shoe Factory. Many of these cards include employees and one has a company band.

There are views of Rosalea Athletic Park, with its "tank", often including members of the lacrosse teams. There are several pictures of Eldorado Park, showing the Credit River and the picnic areas. One of these was published by W.Ward, Churchville. There is also a black and white view of the main street in Churchville. Mrs. C. E. Edwards published several cards, one of which is taken from The Crescent, showing Jennings' Conservatories, the Etobicoke Creek winding through downtown and the backs of houses on Church Street and businesses on Main Street.

I'll end with a quote from the back of a card showing "the Public School, Brampton, Ont." which was dated August 29, 1905.

"Dear Mary:

Are you ever going to come back to Brampton? Really I think it is time. You would hardly know the old town now. It has grown so much this summer. New houses are going up all over. I have been going to write you for a long time."



The Peel Heritage Complex, a rehabilitated prison.

THE STRANGE CASE OF STEFAN SWYRDA

Ken Weber

Robert Broddy had been Sheriff of Peel County for 42 years but he'd never had to deal with anything quite like this. That's why all through January, he'd been going to the CPR Station in Brampton every day, sometimes twice a day. Over in the county jail, there was a prisoner named Stefan Swyrda, and Sheriff Broddy was looking for a telegram from Ottawa to tell him this man did not have to die.

Swyrda was sentenced to hang on February 11, 1909. It was the first ever sentence of execution in Peel, and the procedure would be Sheriff Broddy's responsibility.

To begin with, the practical details were a worry. The jail had been built without execution facilities so they'd have to be rigged up. And the whole province was talking about the terribly botched hanging of William Harvey in Guelph, 20 years earlier. The condemned man remained alive long after the drop - the sounds of his choking heard outside the jail.

Broddy's uneasiness about Swyrda was based on another deeper reason though. Just weeks before, in November, the jury had rendered a verdict of 'guilty' and specifically recommended mercy. But the judge, almost without missing a beat, sentenced the man to hang.

On May 10, the previous spring, provincial police had arrested Stefan Swyrda, about 37 years old, at a boarding house in Toronto, for the murder of Oloek Leutik, about 17 years old. (In the official records there are multiple variations in the spelling of the two names. It is fairly certain that Leutik's citizenship was Austro-Hungarian. He spoke no English. Swyrda was an Austrian, or a Russian from Poland, or possibly Greek. His name is also found in the Balkans. He could speak a few words of English.)

The Crown's position was that Swyrda, an immigrant with some experience in North America - he'd come to Toronto via Rochester in March - had befriended

Leutik, a recent arrival. On or about April 16 (Good Friday), the Crown said, the two had gone to Peel where, in a bush (at present-day Royal Windsor Drive and Southdown Road, then known as Faskin's bush), Swyrda had clubbed the younger man to death, stolen his money, partially buried the body, and tried to burn the weapon (a piece of wood). The body was not discovered until May 3.

Swyrda's account was that he had taken the younger man into his boarding house quarters on April 12, a fact verified by the landlord, and on April 16 took him to the trolley line at King and Queen in Toronto that led to Port Credit. Leutik was going to look for farm work. Swyrda said he stayed in Toronto, did some drinking, slept a little, and then went to look for work. However he undermined his own case by telling the police several different versions of how and when he and the victim had parted company at the trolley line. Nor did he help himself by coming up with money to pay his rent arrears.

Still, the Crown's case was built entirely on circumstantial evidence. A key witness was a woman from a farm close to where Leutik was found. On May 5, three weeks after the alleged killing, she told police that she had seen a man who "looked like" Swyrda with the victim. She said the man wore a light coat and a 'Christy' hat - clothing which Swyrda owned, and on which there were then found stains that "looked like" blood. In 1908, however, light coats were ordinary and 'Christy' hats were popular. The police also found a CPR trainman who had seen someone who "looked like" the accused, washing something at the culvert. Some of Leutik's things were in Swyrda's room, but then the former had been bunking there.

The money issue took on more significance when Swyrda's wife showed up in Toronto on Easter weekend with some cash that Swyrda may have sent her. However, she had been earning wages and it was never established that the money was not her own. (Like her husband she too needed an interpreter, and the records suggest communication was very difficult.)

Viewed a century later, it is hard to see Stephan Swyrda's conviction for murder, and especially the sentence of death, as anything but a gross miscarriage of justice. That" even without considering other factors that must surely nagged at Sheriff Broddy. Swyrda had trouble understanding what was going on in the formality of the court. He had no money to pay his lawyer, Elihu Morris, from a firm in Toronto. The accused, from his jail cell, repeatedly protested his innocence to the guards who got to know him. In his broken English, Swyrda told them he hoped they would

live long enough to learn what really happened to Leutik.

On top of all that was Justice W. R. Riddell's charge to the jury. To the layperson, it seems to be a shocking piece of manipulation, one that scarcely left the 12 good citizens of Peel any choices. Nineteen times Riddell told the jury, either explicitly or implicitly, that they could they believe this or that piece of evidence - but if were up to him ... He made pointed references to Cain, the murdering brother from Genesis; he told the jury that private detectives couldn't necessarily be trusted, but police detectives could be. The judge reminded them that Swyrda had said he'd gone to look for work on Good Friday when everything would be closed, but did not remind them that Swyrda's religion was Greek Orthodox, with a different date for Good Friday.

The judge's final words were the most disturbing. In a case built completely on circumstantial evidence, some of it flimsy at best, Riddell told the jury that he couldn't prevent them from finding Swyrda guilty of the lesser crime of manslaughter, but added, "I hope you will not make yourselves ridiculous by finding such a verdict..."



A mannequin now occupies a cell like the one in which Stephan Swyrda spent his final days. A few of the cells were preserved as museum exhibits when the Peel County Jail was incorporated into the Heritage Complex.

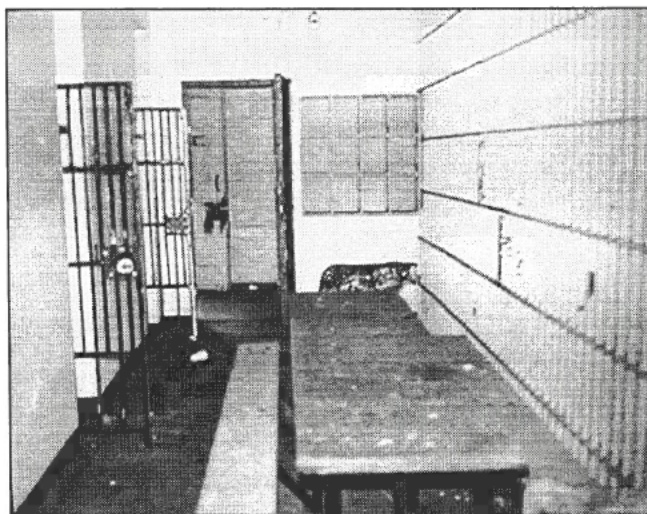
The telegram the Sheriff was waiting for, arrived on January 19th. It was brief, to the point, and really no surprise. There would be no clemency from Ottawa. So Robert Broddy had another task now: he had to see to the building of a gallows in the backyard of the jail. There were only three weeks left to get the job done.

According to contemporary accounts, the execution of Stephan Swyrda was carried out smoothly under Sheriff Broddy's direction. There were two more executions in Peel, one in January 1941 and one in February 1946 before capital punishment was

abandoned in Canada. Both executions took place inside the jail, using a trap door built for the purpose.

After 110 years of service as the jail, the large stone building in downtown Brampton was scheduled for demolition. However, it was saved from the wrecking ball long enough for its future to be re-evaluated when a human skeleton was found on the grounds, thus making them, technically, a cemetery.

The skeleton is believed to be that of Stephan Swyrda whose body was unclaimed after hanging. It is now buried in Meadowvale Cemetery.



As for the old jail, it has been transformed into the Peel Heritage Complex and is now one of the most attractive and interesting buildings in the region. Though much of the building's grim past has been obliterated, visitors to the complex can see where the trap door was located and enter some of the cramped jail cells that have been preserved as museum exhibits.



Copyright of the article "The Strange and Disturbing Case of Stefan Swyrda" is retained by K.J. Weber Limited. The article originally appeared in In The Hills magazine in 1999.



Kee Notes From Fred

By Fred Kee

Westervelts Corners: "No. 10"

The last issue of Buffy's Corner chronicled the history of Lot 10, E Chinguacousy, land originally granted to Robert Smith. The Arthurs family and Walter Calvert family were later owners.

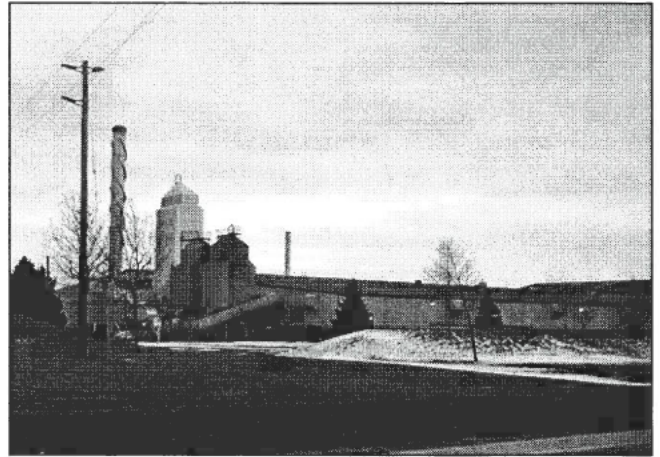
The fifty-acre farm south of the land Calvert purchased had been owned by John Carter and in 1905 was purchased by the Packham family to establish a brick plant. The original brickyard of Packham started at the east end of Wellington Street in Brampton.

The Packham Brickyard operated for many years as Brampton Brick. This operation was purchased by Allan and Morris Kerbel who owned a large development company known as Darcel Construction. The removal of clay continued north to Bovaird Drive until 1980.

Today this large crater has been filled and developed with residential as well as commercial development.

The brick plant was relocated by Darcel Construction north on Highway "10" to Lot 15, west of Hurontario Street at the corner of Wanless Drive and Highway 10.

Darcel Construction also established a cement block plant on Bovaird Drive east of the Etobicoke River and as development of this land progressed it too was moved to the same site as Brampton Brick on Highway 10 at Wanless Drive.



The Brampton Brick facility, on Highway 10 at Wanless Drive.

This part of Westervelts Corners now is completely developed. It has a major commercial section that includes Walmart, Kelsey's, Fortino's, Chapters and many more.

I just realized that a part of the fifty acres that Packhams once owned was Brampton Brick. There was a "Cities Service" gas station as well as a fuel agency to supply bulk petroleum products to the farmers that was operated for many years by Charlie and Joseph Cowie Bros. Farm Fuels.

Canadian Pacific Railway had run a spur line in for the convenience of the brick yard so that cordwood could be shipped in by train load to fire the brick kilns and ship out brick as well.

Cowie Bros. also made use of this by having petroleum products brought in by tank car and then pumped into an elevated storage tank for convenience to load their fuel truck for farm delivery.

BHS Meetings - the third Thursday of the month, from January to May and September to November, 7:15 p.m. Heart Lake Presbyterian Church, 25 Ruth St., Brampton
Wheelchair-accessible; Free to members; others: \$5

Application for membership in the BRAMPTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY (bramhis@rogers.com)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

E mail: _____

Additional Household Members: _____

Signature: _____

☐ I enclose a Household Membership fee of \$20 for a full year

☐ I wish to enclose an additional donation to the Society of \$_____

Please mail cheque or money order to:
Brampton Historical Society
c/o Peter Murphy, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
American money accepted at par